

Arts & Entertainment

Star Tribune

The aftermath of Iwo Jima/14F

Hearing from Nazis' victims and children/14F

The New Wave in Mexican writing/15F

Books/14,15F

Weekly calendar/16F

SUNDAY/AUGUST 25/1991

Books

Star Tribune

Sunday/August 25/1991/14F

Twins, survivors of Auschwitz experiments,

Reviewed by Brian Richard Boylan

A strange phenomenon appears to be starting 50 years after the Germans compounded the ruthless precipitation of World War II with the insanity of the Holocaust. Survivors of the 20th century's nightmare — victims and children of Nazi monsters — are starting to talk and write.

There have been numerous books about the war, the Holocaust and the Nazis, but these two groups of survivors have been strangely silent. In "Children of the Flames," the survivors of medical experiments conducted at Auschwitz on twins and other children by Dr. Josef Mengele tell of their experiences.

What emerges is not precisely the raging inferno that we automatically associate with the ovens and crematoria at Auschwitz. Rather, what we hear in this book are the first collected comments by those children, most of them twins, personally selected by Mengele to live and

serve as the medical investigator's Holy Grail — human experimentation.

The shocking aspect of this hitherto undiscussed aspect of life at Auschwitz is that many of the twins, while hating Mengele's memory with venom, also harbor contradictory recollections and feelings toward the man who was, in a warped view, their savior and protector. By plucking them out of line at the railhead, Mengele saved the children from an immediate trip to the gas chambers. While they were in his care, Mengele saw that they were fed, clothed and treated better than the other doomed inmates.

Instead of being shot arbitrarily for looking cross-eyed at a guard or beaten unmercifully for stealing a potato, many of the twins recall how Mengele would offer them candy, take them by the hand into his laboratory and even try to soften the pain of an experimental injection.

What we have is objective evidence

Children of the Flames

By Lucette Matalon Lagnado and Sheila Cohn Dekel

Morrow

320 pages, \$19.95

of the grossest perversion of medicine coupled with fond recollections by the doctor's victims. Mengele's experiments will be remembered for many years as high among the infamies of the Third Reich. However, this satanic genius is described by the children who were his "patients" in terms that almost portray the man as human and even — Himmler forbid! — kind to his pediatric patients.

A coauthor of this book, Sheila Cohn Dekel, is the widow of Alex Dekel, a Transylvanian Jew who caught Mengele's eye and was saved from extermination. Alex, who died in 1983, had devoted his life since Auschwitz to tracking Mengele and to assembling the tes-

Hitler's Children

By Gerald L. Posner

Random House

239 pages, \$21

timony of his fellow victims.

His friends and colleagues throughout the world were stunned by his sudden death, fearing that his determination might have been wasted. His widow, however, has completed his work with this impressive book.

Unlike Alex Dekel, Gerald Posner is more of a raconteur and Nazi buff than a tracker. The New York lawyer turned writer first attracted attention in 1985 with the discovery of the supposed bones of Mengele. Posner managed to appoint himself a Mengele authority on the grounds that he had collected "several thousand documents" about the fugitive Nazi.

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offer surprising view

But so had every other serious researcher and Nazi hunter who knew how to use the Freedom of Information Act to force the federal government — specifically, the CIA, the FBI and the State Department — to disgorge its bulging files of mostly worthless clippings and secret reports of Nazi-sightings.

However, for "Hitler's Children" Posner visited Germany and interviewed, or at least spoke to, the children of such prominent Nazis as Rudolf Hess (Hitler's deputy), Hans Frank (governor general of conquered Poland), Hermann Goering (Reichsmarshal and head of the Luftwaffe), Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz (the "Weekend Fuehrer") and Mengele.

Posner also talked to a few lesser-known Nazis and to the son of the anti-Nazi Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, the leader of the "officers' plot" to assassinate Hitler (the bomb Stauffenberg planted failed to kill Hitler, and the SS promptly executed Stauffenberg).

The attitudes of those children of the Third Reich varies from outright hatred of Frank (hanged at Nuremberg) by his son, Niklas, to warm, sorrowful recollections by Eda Goering and Wolf Hess, the only children of their respective fathers.

Although Posner does not contribute any original insights, the book is one that should have been written long ago. Many of the offspring of Nazis are reluctant to talk about what is still considered a delicate subject in Germany, except, of course, among the surviving veterans of the SS and their admirers.

Before he committed suicide hours ahead of his scheduled execution at Nuremberg, Hermann Goering declared confidently that one day his name would be vindicated and that within 50 years there would be busts of him in homes and public places. To the credit of the German people, that hasn't happened yet.

Brian Richard Boylan is a novelist, historian and theatrical director.